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Building Thomas Mores Utopia in the Contemporary World- A Superficial Reality

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ABSTRACT

Thomas More's Utopia, written originally in Latin in 1516, sheds light on the frivolous and fallacious society of Europe by juxtaposing it with the fictional, ideal and coherent society, named Utopia. Utopia is a work of political philosophy, demonstrating a fictional dialogue and travelogue. The book, shares two parts, where the first half is based merely upon the dialogue between, More, Hythloday and Giles, while the other half of the book delves into a deeper understanding and depiction of the idealistic society, Utopia. Hythloday gives a detailed account of the Utopians and their society, along with their daily living, economy, military details, governance, marriage and religion. Towards the end of the book, after exposing the true characteristics of a society VS the harsh and existing realities of European society, More, leaves the readers to question and contemplate whether a society like Utopia can exist for real? And this research paper guides exactly based on the same question and urges the people and readers to take efforts communally and built Utopia in the Contemporary world. With collective struggle and individual participation, Utopia is an achievable goal, and not just a fictional world. And this research paper provides for evidences and ways to achieve an ideal society viewing Thomas More's Utopia as an epitome.

Keywords- Contemporary world, Political Philosophy, Satirical Criticism, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

Utopia is a book by Sir Thomas More, which was translated from Latin to English in 1551 by Raphe Robinson. Beginning with the significance of the title, Etymologically, the word Utopia, when broken into two, transcends to have two meanings i.e., U-Topos, meaning No Place and Eu-Topos, meaning good place. Utopia is actually a fictional place created by the author, and do not have a physical existence. Colliding the idea of this fictional society which does not exist for real, with the meaning of its name, Utopia, No Place, signifies the significance of the title. While on the other hand, Utopia as described by Thomas More, also depicts to be a good place, signifying the aptness of the title, "Utopia".

Thomas More, who is the author of Utopia, is not just the author but also, a real-life character in the story, and a historical personage. Thomas More was a lawyer, judge, political philosopher and a statesman. He had served in the court of King Henry VIII, who was the father of Queen Elizabeth I. More had opposed King Henry VIII's separation from the Catholic church and also denied from accepting him as the supreme head of Church of England. In those days, divorce was not in fashion and was considered to be unlawful in the eyes of the Church, and hence Thomas More was against the annulment of King Henry VIII's marriage with Catherine of Aragon, and hence he refused to take the oath of Supremacy, and he was fallaciously convicted of treason and was executed.

Utopia, opens with Thomas More beingin the Netherlands as an ambassador, who is on a diplomatic mission concerning the English wool Trade sent by King Henry VIII of England. And while on the diplomatic journey he befriends Peter Giles and Raphael Hythloday. Raphael Hythloday is a Portuguese voyager, and he claims to have been travelled to the new found land i.e., America along with Amerigo Vespucci. Hythloday is portrayed to be a learned personality who satirizes the European kings, council and Society. He argues to have seen Utopia and describes the Utopia in detail.

Utopian Society and its Principles: -

The Book, Utopia, is divided into two books. Book 1 is about Hythloday's Critique of European Society, and a dialogue between More, Giles and Hythloday that sets a stage for a broader critique of politics, religion and societal norms. While More was returning from the church he finds, Giles talking to an old man named Raphael Hythloday. More, Giles, and

Hythloday walk to More's house, and sitting in his garden talk at length. Hythloday tells about his various adventures and ventures alongside the great historical explorer Amerigo Vespucci and claims to have seen closely and came into contact with the Utopians and regards Utopia to be a perfect place in the world. Hythloday also exclaims that in Europe for small crimes peoples are given death sentence. He criticizes the corruption, inequality and inefficiency of European institutions, particularly those in England. He condemns the monarchy, the legal system and the enclosures that displace peasants, leading to poverty and crime. Hythloday believes that these systematic issues create a cycle of sufferings that could be alleviated by adopting more rational and equitable practices.

More and Giles suggests Hythloday to work as a counselor to the prince and the kings, as he was so knowledgeable, but he clearly refuses, as he believes that all the kings of Europe are very lazy and they do not like the honest advices rather want only the flatterers who would always praise them and their valor. Hythloday's scathing critique serves as a prelude to his description of Utopia, which he presents as a solution to those societal errors and problems.

Book 2, Holds a discussion about the discourse of Utopia. Hythloday begins the discourse of Utopia by stressing on its geography.

Book 2, Chapter 1- The Geography of Utopia: -

The island of Utopia is 200m broad and 500m long in the shape of a crescent. Utopia was not always an island that was called as Utopia. Just like other countries have a history and are named or the existing name is changed based on who conquers it, so is the case with Utopia. Previously, Utopia was called as Abraxa, perhaps meaning "Holy Name", however after Utopus, conquered the place, it came to be known as Utopia. Utopus, civilized the natives of Abraxa. Hythloday describes Utopia as an isolated island, carefully organized to maximize efficiency, harmony and equality. Its 54 cities are identical in layout, features and governance, bringing out the idea of true equality and uniformity among all its citizens. The capital city Amourot, is the seat of Government and embodies the ideals of fairness, governance and justice. The physical isolation of Utopia reflects its independence from the flawed systems of Europe, emphasizing its uniqueness and the impossibilities of contamination by external forces.

Book 2, Chapter 2- Description of cities of Utopia: -

One of the defining features of Utopia is the absence of private property. All goods are shared communally, eliminating greed and material inequality. Hythloday argues that this system promotes social harmony, as citizens focus on collective welfare rather than individual gain. The communal lifestyle also discourages crime, as there is no wealth disparity to incite envy or theft. This principle challenges the European emphasis on property rights and capitalism, offering an alternative vision of economic equality. As the cities are identical and same, so are the values and virtues in the people. Utopia's cities and rationally and practically designed not built Helter-shelter like many European cities. Utopians meticulously care for their gardens, and grow vineyards, various fruits, herbs and flowers. There is nothing so useful and pleasant as these gardens in Utopia. In Utopia, the garden is symbolic of human work and desire, and depicts harmony with the nature. The houses are gorgeous, with three stories, built of stone, plastering or brick. The roofs are made of fireproof plaster that also resist the violent weather. Utopia was not built in a day, but was evolved with passing years, laying focus on practicality and layout of cities and houses along with beautification and ecological balance.

Book 2, Chapter 3- Governance and Justice: -

Utopia's political structure is democratic with representatives elected at various levels to ensure that power remains decentralized and accountable. Magistrates and officials are chosen for their wisdom and moral character. Every group of thirty families or farms elect an officer to represent them, who is a magistrate, but instead of magistrate in Utopia he is termed as Philarch. And every ten philarch is under a magistrate called Archphilarch. All the philarch who number 200 are collectively responsible to elect the chief magistrate who Utopians call Prince (though, not a monarch). Magistrates serve for a term of one year. Every three days the Archphilarch's meet the prince to discuss the problems of the commonwealth, however the matters of urgent importance are addressed first. Justice in Utopia focuses of rehabilitation rather than punishment, with the aim of reintegrating the offenders into society. This approach is a sharpy contrast with the justice systems in Europe's, which Hythloday criticizes for their harshness and ineffectiveness.

Book 2, Chapter 4- Trades and Manner of life (Labor and Leisure): -

In Utopia, all the citizens are required to work but the workday is limited to six hours, ensuring a balance between the labor and leisure. The economy is based on Agriculture and craftsmanship, with every citizen trained in both the trades. This ensures that no one is overburdened and everyone contributes to the society. The surplus generated by efficient labor allows for the equitable distribution of goods and ample leisure time for intellectual and recreational pursuits. Utopians have abolished private property so they have no interest in luxury goods and hence they have no need of occupations other than

the ones that serve the necessities. People are not forced to do any work but rather they choose the type of art work they prefer to opt for. The Utopians work only as much as it is necessary, but however their leisure activities are no more idle than their daily labor. The Utopians utilize their free time to pleasurably bettering their mind and personality. Utopians do not play games like gambling rather play games which help sharpen their minds like chess or didactic games that help virtues overcome vices. Even though Utopians work for six hours they complete all the work necessary for a healthy, happy life. Here, no magistrates sit idle, even they labor, as to set an example and provoke others to work.

Book 2, Chapter 5- Religion and Tolerance: -
One of the most distinctive features of Utopia is its religious freedom. Utopians worship different deities, from sun to great heroes of the past. However, most of them, the wisest of all believe that God is eternal, inexplicable, incomprehensible and imperishable, who is dispersed throughout the world as power and virtue. He, the God is the creator as well as the destructor of all. Despite diverse opinions, Utopians agree that there is on chief and supreme who is the maker of the world, and they call it to be Mithras. Religion in Utopia is pluralistic and tolerant, with citizens free to practice various faiths as long as they uphold moral principles. Hythloday describes the Utopians as spiritually inclined, but not dogmatic, valuing ethical behavior over religious orthodoxy. This religious tolerance is striking in the context of 16th century Europe where sectarian conflict was rampant. More uses this depiction to critique the rigidity and intolerance of European religious institutions.

Book 2, Chapter 6- Education and intellectual life: -
Education is highly valued in Utopia, with a strong emphasis on moral philosophy, science, and the arts. The Utopian believe in lifelong learning and encourage intellectual curiosity among all citizens. They disdain frivolous pursuits, focusing instead on knowledge that benefits society as a whole. The role of education in Utopia is to cultivate virtuous and informed citizens, highlighting the importance of wisdom and critical thinking in governance and daily life.

Book 2, Chapter 7- Families and marriages in Utopia: -
Hythloday now goes on to describe the family structure and marriages in Utopia. In Utopia there is a custom of big joint families, where the wives leave their fathers house after the marriage to live with their husbands, while the husbands stay at their houses only. The eldest member of the family is the head of the family, and each family consists not less than 10 and not more than 16 members, excluding the children. The population in a city of Utopia is 6,000 families per city. If the family exceeds its limit and becomes too big then, the excess members shift into smaller families, and if the city becomes more populous then the excess members of the city, dislocate to a nearby place. Slavery in Utopia is a punishable offence. The age limit for marriage in Utopia is, eighteen years old for girls and at least twenty-two for boys. The matrimonial relationship is never broken in Utopia, except for the act of adultery or intolerant behavior on the part of one of the spouses.

Book 2, Chapter 8- Military practices and peaceful principles: -
Although the Utopians prefer peace and diplomacy, they maintain a well-trained militia for defense. They avoid war whenever possible, but when forced to fight, they prioritize strategies that minimize bloodshed. Utopians view war as a last resort and an unfortunate necessity rather than a pursuit of glory or wealth. This pragmatic yet moral approach to warfare contrasts with the militarism and imperial ambitions of European Nations.

Comparative Analysis: Utopia VS Modern Society: -
Since, we have thoroughly studied that how exactly the idea of Utopia, a perfect society is, yet the practicality of Utopia is skeptical. Is Utopia, just a piece of literature to be studied by graduates? Or is it something to be studied and spread awareness of and attempt to build a society like that of Utopia in modern world? Since, the idea of Utopia, was carved by Thomas More back in 14th century, and back then it was a pure satirical critique for that time Europe, yet in today's contemporary world, few features of Utopia are seen to exist, such democracy, decentralization, marriage institution, family institution and even the education and justice.

Despite having achieved some of its principles, there are a few which have not been achieved by the modern society, for it to become an ideal society. Indeed, a society cannot be judged to be ideal on the basis of a fiction story or by trying to make the world identical to that of utopia. The degree of perfection can only be measured on the basis of, literacy rate, crime rates, economic upliftment, social standards and the political structure. A society where everyone live peacefully being one another's true companion, where they share the means of living communally, and the crime rate is zero, with an economic and political stability, where a man respects another man and follows the norms of the society, would propagate the idea of being a perfect society, just like Utopia. In utopia, the cities, houses and structure were identical, which is totally reverse to what we see in present. Every citizen in Utopia was employed and its occupation and working hours were fixed along with an equitable distribution of goods, while in the modern world, there is economic disparities, unemployment, poverty,

hunger, and labor exploitation. Marriages in Utopia were considered sacred, but today they have remained to be merely game for people, and divorce have become like so casual, and the practice of polygamy, adultery, cheating, pollute the marriage institution in contemporary world. War was the last resort in Utopia, while in the Modern world, nations, and people have become a cut throat enemy of one another, building weapons, nuclear bombs and killing the innocents for becoming super powers and showing dominance over another. In, utopia there was no such concept of private property, everyone shared everything communally, but today the capitalist society has curbed the will of sharing and communal peace. Hence, the contemporary world, is in the need of a communal living with a socialist approach, for the betterment of society.

Technology alongside Utopian Vision: -
When Utopia was written, and this whole idea of Utopia was crafted, Technology didn't exist. But today in the modern world we have technology to shape our society, with the Utopian vision. A combination of technology along with the idea of Utopia would facilitate a swift transformation of the contemporary world. Today's technology has developed drastically, where we have tools such as AI, ChatGPT, Robots, super computers, Satellites, 5G network and many more, thus, putting this technology to a wise use for building a perfect society is a cherry on the top in the present era.

Utopian Ethics: Individual freedom VS Collective harmony: -
In utopia, people didn't care for individual freedom, or personal benefits, they worked, and lived for collective harmony and communal profits, it was their way of life. But in the contemporary world, where every single individual is thriving to gather wealth for his own and his family's sake, where power has spread evil in the conscious of people, would they accept to put their individual freedom at stake for the sake of collective harmony and a perfect society? The modern world that has seen imperialism, colonialism, slavery, freedom struggle and massacres, for them the loss, of individual freedom would mean a complete annihilation of the society and their lives, hence, in the contemporary world for a perfect society to exist along with collective harmony, individual freedom is equally important.

Political Structure: -
Political structure of Utopia and one of the present worlds is somewhat similar. Utopians, supported democracy, and today, if we exclude a few communist nations and monarchs, then the countries have a democratic form of government, along with elections at every level to elect their magistrates, and just like justice in utopia was meant for recreational purposes, so is in the contemporary world, a person committing crime is given all the fair chances to become a responsible citizen and begin a new life again. There are jails, borstal schools, probation officers, and other recreational pursuits to transform the criminals into responsible beings.

Virtues and vices: -
Utopians believed to shun vice and inculcate virtues. And that is the reason why everyone was so tolerant towards one another, and were able to live with a communal approach. Utopians had embedded discipline in their lives, which is seen through their fixed number of working hours, their maintenance of family structures, relations and the environment. Their moral standards were so high that every citizen cared for the environment, and they live in harmony with the nature.And creating this fine balance with the nature is of utmost importance in the present situation to preserve the deploying natural resources, and ecological balance, to save the world from demolishment. A perfect society cannot be shaped in a day, by a bunch of people, but if every single person gives his best and contributes on a personal level and inculcate virtues and shun vices then the idea of utopia won't be far.

Real Life example similar to Utopia
There are a few communities around the world which as per my research provides the base and ideals of Utopians in their living, though, none can be said to be truly 'perfect'. Here are some mind-blowing examples: -

1) **Auroville, India: -**
   This experimental township, in India was founded in 1968, cultivated to provide for human unity and achieve a sustainable way of living. This community of Auroville focuses of spirituality, environmental sustainability and collective well-being. Here, people operate without money they rather have an internal system of "Aurocards" instead of cash.

2) **Maharishi Vedic City, USA: -**
   This city is located in Lowa, and was established on the principles of transcendental meditation as well as Vedic philosophy. The people here practice organic farming and natural health remedies. The architecture in this city is based on the ancient Vedic buildings.

3) **Bhutan: -**
Unlike, other nations, Bhutan is a unique country that prioritizes Gross National Happiness over Economic Growth. The country has maintained balance with nature and resources. They promote sustainable development, focus on preserving forests and implement environmental policies, to uphold the bountiful nature of their country.

4) **Freiburg, Germany: -**
Freiburg is the city, titled as one of the greenest cities in the world, and its neighborhood is powered by solar energy, which is a clean form of energy. The city again emphasizes sustainability and a community-driven urban planning.

5) **Copenhagen, Denmark: -**
The capital city, of Denmark, Copenhagen, is a city that promotes a balance between the modern living and environmental responsibilities. It is renowned for its cycling nature, strong social welfare system and eco-conscious urban planning.

Through none of these cities, communities or countries are flawless Utopias, though each of them encompasses some or the other aspect of Thomas More's Utopia, may it be the sustainable development, communal living or social harmony.

CONCLUSION

Thus, no place can practically be flawless or something that we term as 'perfect', but we can definitely thrive to make the world close to perfect and less erroneous, by idealizing Thomas More's Utopia. But again, the world with no magical chants, or a wand would turn to be flawless, and neither would the people become civilized in a day. But I believe that if every single individual takes a pledge to be a responsible and truthful citizen, try to prioritize communal benefits rather than individual benefit, and understand its duty towards the nature for a sustainable environment, then the vision of building Utopia in the contemporary world would no longer be a superficial reality, ironically it would become the deep reality. Along with individuals there is a great part to be played by the governments, monarchs and magistrates, in building Utopia in modern world to ensure, economic stability, equal distribution of wealth, political stability and a fair and equal system of justice. The Economic and political aspect needs to be looked upon by the governments, but the social aspects, such as, the family institution, marriage institution, religion and welfare, largely rests in the hands of individuals and the society. Thus, taking efforts communally, undoubtedly, we together possess the ability to build a flawless, and near to perfect Utopia, in the present Era.

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